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25 August 1969

Memorandum For: Chief, Indochina Division

Subject : Request for Field Work in South Vietnam
on the Viet Cong Local Forces

41 1. As you know, [] has devoted considerable time over the past year to analysis of the Viet Cong Local Forces. This research forms the basis of the CIA/DIA agreed estimate of Viet Cong Forces that appears in SNIE 14.3-69. Much of this work has been devoted to assessing the extent to which the MACV Order of Battle has understated the number of personnel in the Local Force structure. Largely as a result of Bob's effort MACV has made a number of significant changes in the Order of Battle and we now have a better estimate of these forces than ever before.

2. We will be making suggestions for fundamental changes in the methodology for Local Forces at the upcoming Order of Battle Conference in Hawaii and Saigon. I believe CINCPAC and MACV are likely to be receptive to our recommendations. This should give us a better current picture of the strength and distribution of these forces in the future.

3. Although the end result of our work on the Local Forces has been to increase our own estimate and to cause MACV to increase its estimate, we have concluded that the aggregate strength trend has been downward. Neither we nor MACV at the present time has a time series that reflects this trend. As a matter of fact, past estimates show a rising trend as a result of the effort to improve the base figures.

4. It is imperative that we develop a sound retrospective trend of the strength of these forces. A clear picture of this trend is potentially more useful in assessing Communist strength and capabilities in Vietnam than our estimates of the NVA presence in South Vietnam. To a large extent the latter is a Hanoi policy variable. The capability to maintain the Local Forces, however, is a direct indicator of the Communists' manpower resource in the South.

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5. We have taken our analysis of this subject about as far as we can here in Washington. It is clear from our work with the MACV Order of Battle, our understanding of the information collection and dissemination process in the field, and our conversations with MACV analysts that we have something considerably less than all of the data in Washington.

6. I recommend that we send [] to South Vietnam for a period of six weeks to two months to work on this subject. He needs sufficient time to work with the MACV Order of Battle shop in Saigon and to spend time with analysts at each of the Field Force headquarters and several provinces and districts.

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7. I believe Bob would be welcome at MACV. This is not a subject over which there is any real disagreement. In fact, MACV would undoubtedly be receptive to our preliminary findings.

8. I further recommend that Bob travel to Hawaii with me and participate in the Order of Battle Conference there and in Saigon, and then stay on in Saigon after I return. This would be an ideal way to introduce Bob to the Order of Battle shops at CINCPAC and MACV and he would be an asset at the Conference. If Bob is to go to the Conference, we should know soonest so as to start his processing.

9. I asked Bob for a short discussion of some of the trend indications material that he has in his files. His response is attached.

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[]
Chief, South Vietnam Branch

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Viet Cong Local Force Trends

1. A variety of recent developments suggest that Viet Cong Local Forces are declining and are facing further erosion in many South Vietnamese provinces. Guerrilla strengths are falling off in many places, thus reducing the Local Force manpower pool and forcing the introduction of North Vietnamese into the Local Forces. It is difficult to assess the extent of these trends, however, because historically and currently the information on them is fragmentary. It is sufficient, however, so that further research conducted in Saigon might uncover enough information to reach conclusions on recent strength trends.

2. Viet Cong Local Forces are organized on a geographic basis. Each province has its own Province Military Unit, having both province-wide and district echelon commands, units and staffs. The military units in a province generally are one or more battalions, the main concentrated unit; numerous smaller, specialized units (engineer, sapper, artillery, signal, reconnaissance, special action) at province-echelon, and the subordinate companies, platoons, and squads of each district. Knowledge of these Local Forces is sufficient in only one aspect, and is sketchy at best in its other respects. The Local Force

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battalion is the sole component of the Local Force structure which is well documented. While information on the battalions in some of the more obscure provinces is sparse or missing, one can, on the whole, trace the fluctuation in the total number of battalions and their strength trends countrywide. The rest of the Local Force structure--the specialized provincial units and the district forces--are known only through sparse documentation. Because the documented components of the Local Force structure comprise a large part of it, it has been impossible to trace Local Force strength trends--with one exception. During late 1967 and early 1968, there was an extensive expansion in Local Forces in preparation for the General Offensives of 1968. More recently there have been various indications of Local Force difficulties:

a. Southern Hoa Vang District, GVN Quang Nam Province

A recent document revealed the assignment of a platoon of North Vietnamese to the H16 Local Force Company of Southern Hoa Vang District in GVN Quang Nam Province in July 1968.

b. Thang Binh District, GVN Quang Tin Province

The exceptionally big Local Forces in Thang Binh District in GVN Quang Tin Province have been reduced to one harassed company of 40 men, according to a Stewart Alsop column in which he apparently was relying on local military opinion.

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In his December 13, 1968, column Alsop said the company lost six commanders last year. Captured documents show the district had 200 military personnel in 1967, increased this to 500 in several companies and smaller units in early 1968, and was down to a little more than 200 last September. No documentation appears to be available for the period after September.

c. Binh Dinh Province - Documentation shows the Viet Cong were badly hurt in 1968 in several of the districts in populous Binh Dinh Province, long a VC stronghold. Here the Viet Cong have had one of their biggest local military machines. There were, for example, 15,000 guerrillas in the province in 1965. In February 1968, guerrillas were down to 5,000. In Tuy Phuoc District, half of the district's 12 village guerrilla units became inactive after Tet 1968. The new district concentrated company was composed mostly of recruits. A captured document shows that two men--squad leaders--in one of its squads were North Vietnamese. In another district, Hoai An, captured documents reveal that many of the key village guerrilla cadre were killed last year. The head Viet Cong in An Nhon District, taken prisoner in an operation aimed solely at him, said half of his district's civilian agencies were inactive last year due to lack of personnel. In Phu Cat District, a prisoner of war stated that his unit,

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the 112th Local Force Company, had 60 North Vietnamese among its 95 members in February 1969. Hoai Nhon District, the strongest VC district militarily in the province and still strong through last year, received 27 North Vietnamese cadre from Infiltration Group 156 in April 1968. Also suggestive of the Local Force difficulties has been the inability of the VC to rebuild their veteran D50 Battalion of the province from very low strengths. The battalion, as was fairly typical then, had over 500 personnel in 1965; its strength dropped to the 300's in 1967. Its strength was down in January 1968 and it was never appreciably raised again. It had 178 personnel in January 1968; 211 in March, 180 in April, 188 in May, and 182 in September.

d. Binh Duong, Hau Nghia and Tay Ninh Provinces -

In a January 25, 1969 dispatch, Washington Post writer David Hoffman quoted unnamed military intelligence sources to the effect that 50 to 80 percent of the local forces in these three provinces were North Vietnamese. Hoffman also reported his sources contention that North Vietnamese squads were being attached to village guerrilla units. The assertions are eminently plausible, as these three provinces have been light on guerrillas and have seen some of the heaviest fighting. A captured document does show very weak Guerrilla and Local Forces in one district, Tan Binh,

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in Hau Nghia. In January 1968, each of the district's villages had a Guerrilla squad. By the spring of 1969, only a few Guerrilla cells (totaling 18 men) were left. The district Local Force had been reduced from a company to five small platoons totaling 36 men. Cu Chi District, also in Hau Nghia Province, had potent Local Forces in early 1968: a battalion, six independent companies, and many small units. A document concerning several of the independent companies showed that in 1969 the companies were far understrength at 20 men apiece, except for one company with 50 men. A third district in Hau Nghia, Bang Trang, an old VC bastion, had only 52 men in its local force battalion in mid-1968.

e. Long An Province - A North Vietnamese rallier in Ben Thu District during May, 1969, said two platoons of North Vietnamese were serving the district as a Local Force company. Even then a lack of Guerrilla replacements for village Guerrilla units had forced the North Vietnamese to abandon normal district-echelon military assignments to protect village party chapters.

f. Binh Tuy Province - A rallier from the 460th Local Force Company of Ham Tam District in Binh Tuy Province stated that almost the entire command structure of his company was upgraded to fill higher echelon vacancies.

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g. Kien Phong Province - A captured document revealed that half of the Guerrillas upgraded to Main and Local Force units in the latter part of 1968 deserted.

h. Saigon - Interestingly, most of the sappers targeted against Saigon are North Vietnamese, despite the obvious desirability of their being Southerners who could operate more naturally among the populace. The sappers, most of whom are trained in North Vietnam and infiltrated, are organized into six smallish battalions.

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